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SUBJECT: DECLARING THEIR INDEPENDENTS: WASIT PARTIES RUSH
TO THE CENTER

REF: BAGHDAD 1761

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Robert Kagler for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is a PRT Wasit reporting cable.

12. (C) Summary: Wasit party officials from ISCI, the Sadrist Trend, INA, Fadilah, and Da'wa outlined their provincial election strategies in recent meetings with the PRT. While a Sadrist PC member said he would join the list of another party as an independent, ISCI, Fadilah, INA, and Da'wa leaders all said they plan to field independent and technocratic candidates. For some parties, 'independent' candidates will form the majority of the party list. These plans likely reflect an unspoken acknowledgement that the parties lack a committed popular base and a need to diversify their lists to compete successfully in the elections. These plans also underscore the fluid nature of political identity in the province. End Summary.

13. (C) PRT met June 15 with Sadrist Trend PC member Ahmed Hassan Ebrah, the day after comments by Sadrist spokesman Salah al-Obeidi, about the pseudo-boycott of provincial elections. Ebrah placed Salah's statement in context: "For me, being in the Sadrist Trend is a statement. It's not a political party but a popular movement, and you have the option to do whatever you want to do." Ebrah talked down the significance of the Sadrist label, describing his own Sadrist Trend affiliation in terms that made it seem almost accidental. "Originally, I was elected with the Fadilah party," Ebrah said. "But after a year in the Provincial Council I had a problem with the party because of a DG they wanted relieved, and at that time I elected to go with the Sadrist Trend." Asked which of Wasit's burgeoning stock of independent parties would be most likely to open its arms to him and his fellow Sadrists, Ebrah seemed unconcerned. "Any Iraqi who is not from outside Iraq will open his arms to me as a Sadrist," adding, "I have to consult with my Marja, in Karbala, to make sure it is acceptable for me to run as an independent."

14. (C) PRT met June 7 (REFTEL) and June 17 with Wasit ISCI party chief Ahmed al Hakim. Hakim said that ISCI will run in Wasit with a varied slate that includes independents and technocrats. "We propose to run with independents," he said. "We will run with professors, women, technocrats, and tribal leaders. We are less concerned about how close people are to ISCI." One candidate on ISCI's list will probably be Hakim himself. "I do not have any desire to run," he said, "but there is no conflict to be head of ISCI and run for the Provincial Council, and people are asking me to run at the top of the list." Addressing the requirement for female representation, Hakim complained that "25 percent (parliamentary representation) doesn't exist even in Europe. The men removed for women may be more qualified," adding that "women should have their own list."

15. (C) On rumors that ISCI would form a slate with Da'wa, Hakim said his superiors had instructed that no coalitions be

formed before the voting; he commented that "such marriages work better when they are consummated after the elections, not before." Hakim claims to oppose closed lists, favoring instead a mixed approach that allows people to vote for a slate or for an individual within the slate. He opined that the marja'iyya will play an important role in the elections as the "people have a religious spirit." PRT Team Leader commented that the U.S. would take hands-off approach to the provincial elections. Hakim responded that this position had not been made clear in the media.

¶16. (C) Hakim characterized Salah al-Obeidi's June 14 announcement on Sadr's opposition to provincial elections as a response to the prohibition on allowing parties with militias to run, while at the same time masking a probable weak Sadrist Trend showing in elections. "They have been losing their followers ever since the Shabaniyah Festival in Karbala (in 2007)," Ahmed said. "They say they are against the Coalition, but lately so much of their violence is targeting ISF." Region formation among southern provinces is a topic that cleanly divides Sadrist Trend and ISCI, and Ahmed expects it to be "a top issue" in the campaign. He claimed that regions formation "is the wish of the people in the south. They dream of a calm security situation like in Kurdistan."

¶17. (C) PRT met June 12 at al Kut's Da'wa headquarters building with Wasit Da'wa party chief Magid Ali Askar and his brother Fares. "We are preparing our list," said Fares, "including some technocrats. People with that background are needed to rebuild Iraq. Our list will contain people from all over Wasit. If the person we need is available within

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Da'wa, we will select him. If not, we will look for an independent. In some cases, we will select famous people, to get people out to vote." Added Magid: "Most of the names on our list will be technocrats, and not Da'wa. But not all. I am a member of the PC. The PC needs politicians as well. The PC needs a mix." On coalitions: "So many of our friends have decided to run as independents. Our plan right now is to build a coalition after the election."

¶18. (C) On elections, Magid expressed concern that NGOs covertly linked to a particular party will be tasked with voter education. Asked about foreign influence in the elections, he said "Support from other countries will take the form of money, media support, and tarnishing the reputation of other candidates." Fares added: "We see parties that have no support and all of a sudden they have money. Iraqi-Americans are supporting their candidates. The United States is supporting candidates who are friendly and who are starting their own parties." (Note. PRT explained that the PRT is not supporting parties or individual candidates. End note.) Magid predicted a successful showing by Da'wa, noting that the party is "popular due to the success of the Prime Minister" and the fact that it does not have a militia. When asked about the impact of former PM Jaafari's recently formed political movement, Magid dismissed Sayyid Jaafari as "not having much influence" since he left the prime ministership. Referring to the recent ISF counter-JAM operations, Magid criticized the former PM for not backing Maliki against "the criminals."

¶19. (C) PRT met June 20 with INA Security chief Jabber Nammah Khashan, who reported that INA in Wasit has already prepared its slate of 29 PC candidates. Party chairman Magid al Maqsousi is first on the list; Wasit textile factory manager Engineer Yasser Na,ama Idris al Yassiri has the second spot; and Jabber, s wife has the third. The INA, per Jabber, will follow the practice of a number of other parties by running "more than 50 percent" independent candidates. &We have people on our list who are technocrats, people who have not been involved in politics," Jabber said, adding that "five or six" of INA's candidates are ex-Baathists. "We have an agricultural engineer. He was educated in Sweden," Jabber

said. "If he was not a Baathist, he would not have been able to get this education." Jabber is a fan of open lists. "The PC is full of Iranians," Jabber said. "The closed list is the only way for these people to keep their jobs. We will focus in the election on the connections between the Iranians and the PC." Sensitive to the possible drawbacks of the INA's secular image, Jabber noted that both he and the party head are sayyids, or descendants of the Prophet.

¶10. (C) PRT met June 23 with Wasit Fadilah party chief Jaafar Sayidi and his deputy, Hussam Farhan Youssef. Jaafar is a petroleum engineer; Hussam is a civil engineer. Jaafar supports an open list system. "In the last election, voters did not know who they were voting for," adding that "it would be better if people could pick multiple candidates." Fadilah plans to place independent candidates on its while criticizing political rivals for being less independent than claimed. "Running as independents is a signal to the voters that we are not connected to any of the parties. But they are in fact connected to the parties, including the religious parties. Independent parties are often the opposite of what they appear." Jaafar sees the situation as "the same as in the last election, when a number of parties were created just to get people elected and then disappeared after the elections." Jaafar explained that voters will "focus on the name of the candidate, not on the party" and was clear that there were no plans to merge with any other party or run as part of a coalition. "This decision has been taken," he said. Jaafar expressed concerns that candidates would make false claims about support from Grand Ayatollah Sistani and he said there was a risk of fraud but did not make specific accusations.

¶11. (C) Central election themes for Fadilah in Wasit are fighting corruption and putting people back to work. Fadilah has a proposal for \$10,000 micro-loans to spur small business development. On corruption, Jaffar said "If hands were clean, the citizens would see more progress. We tried to fight corruption by having some of the DGs switched out, but this did not solve the problem from the root. Fadilah has proposed an idea for an independent oversight committee to monitor construction projects." Jaafar does not expect a significant focus on the question of federalism, offering that federalism "within a single province" is the best solution. "It may possible for Wasit to have its own region with a neighboring province," Jaafari said, "because they share water resource concerns and tribes cross provincial borders. But this is in the future." Sounding the only defensive note in the meeting, Jaafar observed that "the people have the impression that the parties who came from

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outside Iraq have more power than those which stayed in Iraq. We are the party that stayed, but we are marginalized."

¶12. (C) Comment: The fact that all major parties plan to run independent candidates suggests that party leaders are aware of the widespread public discontent over the corruption, ineffectiveness, and militia violence associated with the Shia parties. At the very least, the voters of Wasit are being humored, if not heard; as these candidates will presumably be indebted to the party leadership, it remains to be seen how truly 'independent' they are once elected into office. End Comment.
CROCKER